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***OF HANCOCK COUNTY***

**Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi**

*Mississippi's Bicentennial  
1817—2017*

**June2017**

## **COMING EVENTS AT LOBRANO HOUSE**

The monthly luncheon meeting will be held on Thursday, June 15, 2017, at noon at the Kate Lobrano House. Guest speaker for the program will be Edmond Boudreaux, who will speak on Native Americans across the Mississippi Gulf Coast counties. **Reservations are required** and may be made by calling 467-4090. **Respectfully we must request that you please call by noon on Wednesday, June 14,** to make your reservation, to help us plan seating which is limited to forty-eight people, and to apprise us of the number for whom to prepare. The price of lunch is \$12.00, catering by Almost Home Catering, Michelle Nichols, chef.

## **ANNUAL CEMETERY TOUR**

Even though October is still a few months away, it's not too early to begin thinking about and planning the Cemetery Tour. The 23nd Annual Cemetery Tour will be held on Halloween night, Tuesday, October 31, 2017, at Cedar Rest Cemetery on Second Street in Bay Saint Louis. Needed are volunteers to prepare the cemetery for the tour, to portray citizens buried there, and to act as guides. To volunteer, please call 228-467-4090. All actors and guides must be members of the Historical Society.



This is an oyster boat in the Old Basin Canal in New Orleans. The large building in the background is at the back of the French Quarter.

## **A Maritime History of Hancock County 1820-1860: The Era of Sailing Ships**

By  
James Keating, M.D.

Wind-powered sailing ships and boats were the practical means of transportation in Hancock County during its early period from 1820-1860. Schooners and small sloops and catboats were the principal vessels carrying freight and passengers before

the advent of steamboats. This maritime history will describe the infrastructure of that shipping commerce, the products of trade, and the critical role the port of New Orleans played in this story of Hancock County's early economy.

Early settlers utilized the waterways of the Pearl River and the relatively shallow Mississippi Sound of the Gulf Coast as the preferred routes of commerce and transporta-

***Schooner—a two masted sailing ship***  
***Catboat—a one masted boat***

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# HISTORIAN

OF HANCOCK COUNTY

Eddie Coleman, Editor  
James Keating, Publisher

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## LOBRANO HOUSE HOURS

MONDAY — FRIDAY  
10:00AM — 3:00PM  
Closed: 12:00—1:00 (lunch)

## MISSION STATEMENT

"TO PRESERVE THE GENERAL AND ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY OF HANCOCK COUNTY AND TO PRESERVE THE KATE LOBRANO HOUSE AND COLLECTIONS THEREIN; TO RESEARCH AND INTERPRET LIFE IN HANCOCK COUNTY; AND TO ENCOURAGE AN APPRECIATION OF AND INTEREST IN HISTORICAL PRESERVATION."

tion. Dotted all along the Gulf Coast and at the mouth of every river, boatyards built, maintained, and repaired hundreds of wooden marine vessels. Boat building by skilled craftsmen required framing, planking, and caulking of the wooden hull with naval stores before rigging the sails. In fact, commercial fishermen, net makers, sail makers, carpenters, pilots, coppersmiths, and sawyers were very busy along the coast. Furthermore, this vibrant economy flourished because of the skilled craftsmen of the slave mariners and artisans. These sailing vessels could travel from Mobile to New Orleans in the relatively protected waters inland of a string of barrier islands including Dauphin, Cat, Horn, and Ship.

On the Pearl River, crops and timber floated downstream on flatboats and rafts to Gainesville and Pearlington and were then transferred to schooners for transport to New Orleans. In 1831, lighthouses were built on the mainland of Pass Christian and offshore on Cat Island to guide sailors at night or in the fog. Contrary to popular belief, the Mississippi River was not the preferred approach to New Orleans by these sailors and merchants because ascending this tortuous river required favorable southern winds and considerable sailing skills and patience. Instead these local sailors preferred a back door approach via Bayou St. John, which had been discovered in 1699 by the French explorer Jean Baptiste LeMoyne, Sieur Bienville. Not only was this approach closer for local traffic from the Mississippi Sound, but it was also easier to travel across Lake Pontchartrain and avoid the strong currents of the Mississippi River.

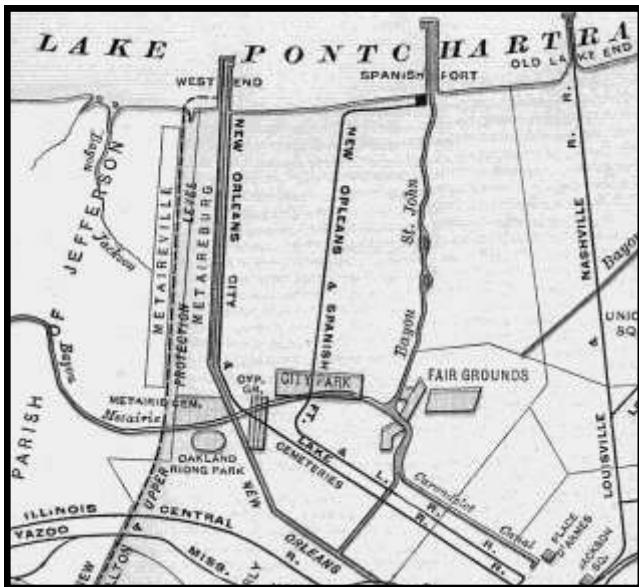
In 1794 the governor of Louisiana, Baron Carondelet, built a canal from the head of Bayou St.

John to the back of the French Quarter which was known as the Old Basin Canal. By the early 1820's, eighty local vessels mostly from the Gulf Coast were reported using this canal daily. In the 1830's a larger New Basin Canal was dug in New Orleans that accommodated even more ships and boats because of the increased local commerce from the Gulf Coast. In fact, sailing vessels were an integral part of life in Hancock County in this era, and many of them were built by one-time shipbuilders who used them for personal transportation.

A variety of products were produced for trade in Hancock County during this time. In 1831 Pearlington was a small port but had a mercantile store owned by Andrew Hawthorne. This town traded firewood and cotton with New Orleans in exchange for supplies such as flour, sugar, tools, and manufactured goods which were needed by the settlers. These early settlers were farmers and breeders raising cattle, sheep, and hogs. Corn and rice were the principal crops before 1837 in Hancock county. But in the 1840's cotton emerged as the major crop in Mississippi. Before being shipped to New Orleans, cotton from the back country and from up river from large plantations above the 31st parallel was processed at "the gin" located between Pearlington and Logtown.

Entrepreneur Bill Whitfield moved to Hancock County from Florida in 1845, made money cutting firewood, saved enough to buy a few calves, and in time built up a herd of cattle. Later, he moved to Gainesville where he operated a store and also acquired two river-boats for business.

Forest products began to emerge in the 1840's in Hancock County as a principal industry.



Logs were cut along the banks of the Pearl River and floated down to sites such as Logtown, Gainesville, and Pearlington. This industry provided employment for many workers cutting and shipping firewood. Two reasons caused the local shipbuilding and lumber mills to grow: the number of ships needed to transport the firewood and the nearness of Hancock County to New Orleans.

With the steam engine powered saw instead of earlier, more primitive handsaws, the lumber industry advanced from firewood and charcoal to lumber building material. In fact, by 1840 there were ten sawmills in the county. The production of charcoal needed by blacksmiths and homes in New Orleans developed a prosperous business in the area now known as "The Kiln" on the Jourdan River. The number of kilns, ovens for burning, baking, or drying wood among other things, also developed an industry known as naval stores which produced pitch, tar, and turpentine, a product necessary for building and maintaining wooden ships.

Bill Poitevant was an entrepreneur who came to Pearlington in 1829 from North Carolina and made a fortune operating sailing

In 1794 Baron Carondelet, governor of Louisiana, built a canal from the back of the French Quarter along Bayou St. John to Lake Pontchartrain to permit commercial boat traffic from the lake into the city of New Orleans.

ships on the Pearl River and the Gulf Coast. He built a general store and a lumber mill in Gainesville. These types of merchants and cotton planters were the most prosperous citizens of the Pearl River valley in that time frame. But ninety percent of the settlers in antebellum Hancock County lived in houses made of logs. These homes were often just one room cabins, hardly a lifestyle of "moonlight and magnolias" depicted in *Gone with the Wind*.

The port of New Orleans played an important role in this maritime history of Hancock County. Not only was it the market destination for most of our products for trade, but it was also a critical source of capital and insurance for entrepreneurial ventures. Restriction of trade with other countries during the European colonization period limited the development of trade and commerce in the city and surrounding territory such as the Gulf Coast. However, once the area became part of the United States, things changed. After the Louisiana Purchase, there was a large migration of settlers to the Mississippi River Valley and merchants to the Crescent City. The port under American owner-

ship promptly experienced expanded trade with other American ports such as Boston, Philadelphia, and New York. These trading vessels were sloops and schooners of 250 tons. There were no better seamen than American sailors. In this port, domestic American commerce exceeded foreign commerce until 1830 when foreign commerce became dominate. Sailing ship visits to New Orleans in 1846 included 1,997 ships and brigs and 875 schooners. From 1840—1860 New Orleans commerce centered on cotton and slaves. The banks were overflowing with cash in these flush times.

Although Hancock County did not succeed in cotton production, it benefited from the excess capital available in New Orleans for investment by its merchants, planters, and mill owners. The city built a banking system with a strong but elastic currency that adapted to the needs of the whole Gulf South and Mississippi River Valley. Moreover, a parallel insurance industry vital to any vibrant marketplace evolved with the abovementioned banking sector. European purchasers paid the southern planters/farmers for their crops and products in commodity exchanges established by these bankers well known at the time in Paris, London, and Amsterdam.

Necessity is the mother of invention. The cotton gin, invented by Eli Whitney, transformed the cotton industry in the South. The steam engine saw transformed the timber industry. Steamboats improved maritime trade allowing freight to be transported upriver as far as Jackson on the Pearl River and as far as Pittsburgh on the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers. The era of sailing ships would last until the early 20th century, but by then it was mostly limited to the seafood

industry and recreational yachting. European colonization of Louisiana and Mississippi was not very successful financially because it did not attract a large mobile emigrant population, inject capital (banking and insurance) into the province, or provide entrepreneurial expertise (merchants) to develop markets. Conversely, the economy of Hancock County and the Gulf Coast flourished in the first half of the 19th century under the auspices of American free market capitalism. A forthcoming article in this publication will describe the steamboat era.

#### SOURCE:

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#### MISSISSIPPI TIMELINE

**1798**—Congress established the Mississippi Territory including most of present-day Mississippi and Alabama with Winthrop Sargent as territorial governor

**1803**—Louisiana Purchase

**1804**—Congress extended the northern boundary of the Mississippi Territory to

Tennessee. A report showed about forty-eight families on the Gulf Coast; most, if not all, were French or Spanish Catholics.

**1805**—Choctaws ceded over four million acres in the Treaty of Mount Dexter.

**1810**—In September the Republic of West Florida was established. In December President James Madison annexed West Florida to the U. S.

**1812**—Congress divided West Florida with the area between the Pearl River and the Perdido River becoming part of the Mississippi Territory. The area between the Pearl River and the Mississippi River became part of the new state of Louisiana.

**1813-1816**—Thirty-three hundred families from Virginia, Tennessee, the Carolinas, and Georgia, all of whom were Anglo-Saxon protestants migrated to the Mississippi Territory.

**1817**—The western portion of the Mississippi Territory was admitted to the Union as the state of Mississippi.

**1820**—Choctaws ceded more than five million acres to the state of Mississippi in the Treaty of Doak’s Stand.

**1830**—The Mississippi legislature passed the act to extend jurisdiction

over all Indians within the state boundaries.

**1832**—Choctaws were removed from the state by force by the Trail of Tears.

**1833**—The legislature authorized the leasing of 16th section land with proceeds going to public education.

**1837**—Chickasaw removal began.

**1839**—The legislature passed the Mississippi Women’s Property Act of 1839.

**1841**—Harrison County was created from Hancock County.

**1846**—The 1st Regiment Mississippi Infantry joined the Battle of Monterrey in the Mexican War under command of Colonel Jefferson Davis.

**1847**—Mississippi proclaimed the first Thanksgiving Day holiday on November 25.

**1853**—Jefferson Davis became US Secretary of War.

**1854**—St. Stanislaus College was established in Bay St. Louis by Brothers of the Sacred Heart.

**1855**—St. Joseph’s Academy was established by the Sisters of St. Joseph in Bay St. Louis.

**1858**—The Historical Society of Mississippi incorporated to preserve state archives.

**1859**—Mississippi became the leading cotton producer in the U.S.



Are you looking for a Christmas or a birthday gift? You’re in luck. The Hancock County Historical Society will be raffling off a Men’s GX Genesis bicycle. The drawing will be held at the Christmas Tea. Tickets can be purchased for \$1.00 each or six for \$5.00 at our monthly luncheons or weekdays at the Lobrano House.

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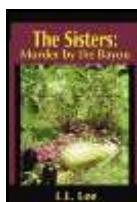
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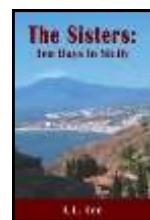
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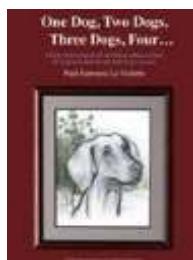
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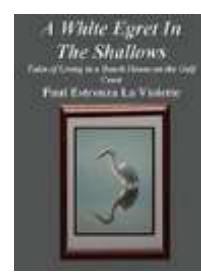
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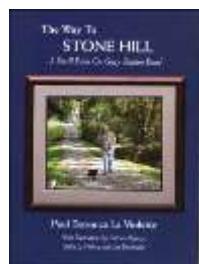
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